

An Appendicular Supplement and Open Letter

by Olchar E. Lindsann

concerning the essay

**“Toward (and away from) A (potential)
Nagean Pataphysics”**

also by Olchar E. Lindsann

concerning Pataphysics,

Mathematics, and a Nagean

Explanation of the number of words

in the above-named essay.

For Mark Leahy.

(sorry.)

To whom it may concern:

I am attaching this prefacexplanationlettermissiveappendix to the body of my essay, *Toward (and away from) A (potential) Nagean Pataphysics* for two main purposes (in addition to a few supplementary ones). One is to introduce some critical background to the piece itself, for Pataphysics (as you will find) is by its nature fiercely inward-turning, potentially hermetic, patantially occult; and for those not familiar with certain terms, sources, and areas of Pataphysical concern, these carefully constructed Anti-symmetries and Anti-logical arguments might appear as meaningless chaos, rather than meaningless structure.

1.} This essay contains a number of references to various ~~definitions~~ of the Anti-discipline known as Pataphysics, given by Alfred Jarry, its (Anti-)founder. Many of these (taken from *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*) are so thoroughly ingrained in its practitioners as to be commonly invoked in their texts merely by a single word or phrase without being made explicit. I have appended a list of these canonical definitions; pay particular attention to the wording and metaphorical themes themselves. Some additional definitions will come into play in the piece itself.

2.} Two terms have come to be traditionally invoked in Pataphysical discourse in a particular way: *the clinamen* as a swerve, on some register, that disrupts a given order or circuit of transmission; and *the syzygy* as a coming together, or superinduction, of two disparate elements.

3.} Most engagements with Pataphysics have involved as their principle (though not exclusive) strategy the bringing together in some way of a literary/poetic/imaginative model with either a mathematical model (Oulipo), or a scientific model (Canadian “Pataphysics”).

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The second (main) goal of this letter (which, might I stress, is to be regarded simply as a helpful *supplement* of the piece itself) is to explain, in the most straightforward way possible, the number of words contained in this essay, both the apparent number and the actual.

Having set out from the end, this essay was to have contained, very precisely, 5000 words. While it may seem to have failed in this goal according to banal logic, the mark was, in fact, quite closer when considered Pataphysically.

According to Microsoft Word, this piece of criticism includes exactly 8,375 words. However, I must stress that (Microsoft Word being, when approached as a word-counting tool, nearer to the metaphor of a club than that of a stiletto) this is merely the *apparent* number of words; but after a short explanation of several factors involved in this revelation, I shall proceed systematically to demonstrate that I have, in fact, when looked at in a more judicious light, approached the paradigmatic goal of 5,000 quite closely.

First, let me point out that if we designate the ideal number of words in the essay as  $x$ , and the ideal amount of intellectual capital, or “meaning” as  $y$ , the equation that most perfectly expresses the *ideal* state of the projected essay is:

$$x = y.$$

However, upon closer inspection, we realize that  $y$  is not in fact a number, and that in the present situation (i.e. algebraic rather than phonetic) it can in fact signify *any* number- for instance 6, or 5000, or 93, or  $385,430^{-6}$ .

$x$  however, has been fixed in its signification, thus:

$$5,000 = y$$

It has, however, been conclusively shown, in different ways, that  $x$  (the word) can never be charged with a strict one-to-one (or  $x$  to  $x$ , or  $y$  to  $y$ ) correspondence with intellectual capital, i.e. “meaning.” (see McCaffery, “Writing as a General Economy” [McCaffery 2000, pp 201-221 or Derrida, “Speech and Phenomenon.” [Derrida 1991, pp 6-30.]) As a result, if 5,000 is taken as a constant, then  $y$ , which we now realize *can never* equal  $x$ , must always have a certain amount of “capital” or “meaning” either added to or subtracted from it in order to restore an equilibrium. This can be expressed mathematically in one of two ways, depending on the value of  $y$  relative to  $x$ :

$$y = y - z$$

or,

$$y = y + z$$

Therefore, in order to equate  $y$  with  $x$ , we are *always* faced with one of two equations (or, potentially, a point of tangency between them which is nonetheless not a mere neutrality). Thus:

$$5,000 = y - z$$

or,

$$5,000 = y + z$$

The former might represent Lautreamont, Derrida, Jarry, or Stein; the latter Hemingway or Kostelanetz. In my case, the former is most certainly the case, since the very confusion bred by syntactic complexity, and the added subtlety for grammatical and semantic manipulation that it allows, is vital to the working of any potential Nagean Pataphysics, which must operate as much on the level of literary technique, rhetoric, and structure as on argumentation. Thus I am faced with one of two possibilities:

$$5,000 = y - z$$

*or,*

$$5,000 < y$$

Given this choice, I was first tempted to choose one or the other (either less “meaning” in  $x$  [or 5,000] words, or else  $y$  meaning in more than 5,000 words), but soon struck upon a way to satisfy the word-count after all. Through subtracting from the count those words which, in one way or another, represent the excess of the text as a whole, I could reconstitute the equation thus:

$$y - z = 5,000$$

This may seem like a “mere” reversal of the equation, but this reversal, as I will show, is all-important. In the equation:

$$5,000 = y - z$$

we must *begin* with 5,000, and attempt to force  $y$  into it. We could not merely subtract  $z$ , because (since  $y$  can stand for any number, which can never be equal to whatever  $x$  signifies) we would *still* have to define  $y$  (in relation to  $x$ ) as  $y - z$ . However, when the equation is reversed:

$$y - z = 5,000$$

We *begin* with  $y$ ; since  $x$  has not yet entered the equation,  $y$  does *not yet* need to be defined as equal to  $y - z$ . Therefore, when we cross the parallel bars to 5,000, we simply start from the value of  $y$  (“Meaning”) and subtract  $z$  from it, in order to come to 5,000.

In practical terms: since  $x$  has not yet entered the equation,  $y$  can be assigned a value independently of it (in this case, 8,375 words). Now, having *already* independently determined a value for  $y$ , we cross the parallel bars to bring  $x$  (in this case 5,000) into play, resulting in the following equation:

$$8,375 - z = 5,000$$

Our job is now half done;  $z$  has shown itself to be 3,375 words, and we merely need to subtract them from the count!

Therefore, I propose that the following words, which represent (by way of a kind of structural and rhetorical metaphor) the “excess” meaning that has temporarily disrupted our count, be subtracted from the *actual* word-count of this piece:

*Title of the piece, which is decidedly supplementary, serving no argumentative purpose whatsoever:*

8 Words.

*Sizeable excisions from others authors’ texts (which are not, strictly speaking, my own words) presented, like an ocean turned on its port side<sup>1</sup>, as smooth, flat, and justified on the left, and jagged, treacherous, and studded with coral on the right. These large sections of text are essential for both the close-reading and the stylistic and syntactic analyses and comparisons that are central to a potential Nagean Pataphysics:*

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<sup>1</sup> Assuming that the observer is situated near the stern of the ocean, facing the bow.

1,276 Words, including exactly 420 relating directly to utterances of Bosse-de-Nage.

*Since a certain passage from Derrida was referred to thrice, it must naturally be counted (and subtracted) three times, bringing this number to:*

1,436 Words.

*Other quoted material, not strictly my own words:*

757 Words, including exactly 20 quoted from Bosse-de-Nage.

*Titles of books by others, certainly not my own words:*

123 Words.

*Proper names, to which I can certainly make no claim as “my own”:*

240 Words exactly.

*However, since 51 of these names are “Bosse-de-Nage” which, potentially, I might claim at least provisionally due to my re-interpretation of him as a figure that I have in some way*

*“claimed” through my (mis-)reading, as well as by way of the etymological root of the very name “Nagean Pataphysics;” and which, therefore, ought not to be subtracted, let the final number be:*

179 Words.

*Citations, which are unnecessary to the argument itself:*

68 Words.

*Helpful (but nonetheless excessive) notices concerning whether particular phrases have been italicized by myself, or someone (or something) else:*

157 Words.

*Supplementary material presented in parentheses:*

665.5 Words. (This includes “mis-” which is a syllable, but not an entire word. Did this number come to 666, it would, of course, signify the Antichrist, (Jarry 1992.) who is the perfect Pataphysician according to Jarry’s *Caesar Antichrist*, and/or potentially Bosse-de-Nage himself; but since we are one phoneme short, this

paper's supplementary parentheses must be content with referring merely to a *potential* Antichrist...)

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This then, brings the total count of subtractable, "excessive" words to:

3,385.5 Words.

Plugging this number, then, into our equation, we find that:

$$8,375 - 3,385.5 = 4,989.5$$

Thus:

$$y = 4,989.5$$

Please bear in mind that some margin of error is inevitable; after all, as we know, mathematics can only ever work perfectly in an ideal world; when put into practice, all sorts of matters intervene, and our earthly experiments, however accurate, can never attain the purity of an abstract calculation.

I hope you will forgive me for my paper being 10.5 words too short.

Sin/cerely,

Olchar E. Lindsann

Works Cited in this (purely supplementary) Letter

Derrida, Jacques and Kamuf, Peggy, ed. (1991). *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*. New York: Columbia University Press.

McCaffery, Steve. (2000). *North of Intention: Critical Writings 1973-1986*. 2nd Ed. New York: Roof Books.

Jarry, Alfred, Melville, Antony, trans., and Broatch, Alastair, Ed. (1992). *Caesar Antichrist*. London: Atlas Press.

Jarry, Alfred, Shattuck, Roger, ed., and Taylor, Simon, ed. (1965). *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry*. Paperback Edition. London: Jonathan Cape.

**Supplemental Supplement: Quotes About Pataphysics from
*Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician.***

(Jarry 1965, pp 173- 276.)

An epiphenomenon is that which is superinduced upon a phenomenon. Pataphysics... is the science of that which is superinduced upon metaphysics, whether within or beyond the latter's limitations, extending as far beyond metaphysics as the latter extends beyond physics. (p. 192)

An epiphenomenon being often accidental, pataphysics will be, above all, the science of the particular (p. 192)

Pataphysics will examine the laws governing exceptions... (p.192)

...and [Pataphysics] will explain the universe supplementary to this one (p.192)

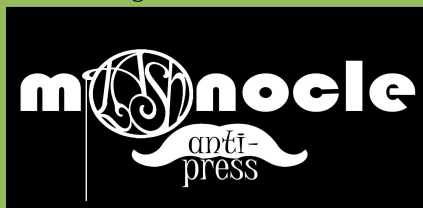
... will describe a universe which can be- and perhaps should be- envisaged in the place of the traditional one (p. 192)

Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions... (p. 193)

...which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments (p. 193)

...Instead of formulating a law of the fall of a body toward a centre, how far more apposite would be the law of the ascension of a vacuum toward a periphery... (p. 193)

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mOnocle-Lash Anti-Press
monoclelash.wordpress.com
monoclelash@gmail.com